

## Words of Life, Words Like a Knife

1. Warm up: On Sunday Jeff told a humorous story about his mom getting very upset when he wiped snot on the wall. What's something stupid you did as a kid that made your mom (or whoever raised you) very upset?
2. On Mother's Day, we tend to idealize our moms. But the truth is, there's no such thing as a perfect mom. Like every other category of human being, moms exist on a continuum that ranges from incredibly good to incredibly bad, with virtually all moms falling somewhere between the two extremes, complex mixtures of both strength and weakness.
  - a. If you had to pick one word that best captures the essence of your mother, what word would you choose?
  - b. For those who are mothers or fathers (or have been like a mother or father to someone), what is/was one of your greatest strengths as a parent? What is/was one of your greatest weaknesses as a parent?
3. Jacob's parents (Rebekah and Isaac) were loving, but terribly flawed. Jacob and his brother Esau were also quite flawed. As we saw last week, Isaac favored Esau, while Rebekah favored Jacob. In last week's story, Jacob took advantage of his brother's impulsiveness, convincing him to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup. But the drama didn't stop there. In this week's story, Jacob also managed to steal the death-bed blessing Isaac intended for Esau. Read Genesis 27:1-35, as printed on pp. 3-4. This is a long reading, so you may want to divide it up among several readers.
  - a. As we're getting to know Jacob and his family, what word would you use to describe each – Jacob? Esau? Isaac? Rebekah?
  - b. At the very end of today's story beyond where we stopped reading, Esau was so angry with Jacob, he decided to murder him, so Jacob had to flee for his life. After all this went down, describe how do you imagine each family member felt – Esau? Isaac? Rebekah? Jacob?
4. Once Isaac mistakenly conferred the blessing on Jacob, Isaac believed his words could not be called back. In verse 33, Isaac tells Esau, "I have blessed [Jacob] and blessed shall he be." In verse 35, he says, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing." A footnote in the NRSV Study Bible says, "Death bed blessings (and curses) were important in the life . . . of ancient peoples. It was believed that such blessings irrevocably released a tangible power that determined the character and destiny of the recipient. . . . The blessing was believed to release a power that could not be retracted [once spoken]." Jeff said, "The more I think about it, the more I'm convinced that ancient people were a lot closer to the truth about the power of words than we are."

- a. Proverbs 18:21 says, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” What do you think that means? Is it an overstatement? Why or why not?
  - b. Romans 4:17 tells us that “God calls into existence the things that do not exist.” In other words, God created all that is through the power of the spoken word – “Let there be light, and there was light!” Then God shared the power of speech with us humans. Jeff called this our “superpower.” To what degree do you believe words actually have the power to create the future? Explain your answer.
  - c. Jesus said, “I tell you, on the Day of Judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” What do you think Jesus meant? Do you think we should take this verse literally?
5. Now let’s apply what we’ve been talking about to our lives. Let’s think about how the words of our parents and others have shaped us and how our words are shaping the people around us. There won’t be time for each of us to answer every question, but pick your spots and share.
- a. Tell us about a time one of your parents said something that was very life-giving to you.
  - b. Tell us about a time one of your parents said something that had a significant adverse impact on you.
  - c. Tell us about a time you’ve been able to say something very life-giving to someone.
  - d. Tell us about a time you’ve said something that you really wish you could call back because it had such an adverse impact.
  - e. Proverbs 12:18 says, “Speak without thinking and your words can cut like a knife. Be wise, and your words can heal.” When we get upset with someone, it’s especially important that we not lash out, but rather choose our words carefully, striving to use words that might actually help foster progress and create a more positive reality. Think of someone you’re upset with right now. What would be the destructive thing to say? Would might you say that could actually lead to constructive progress?
  - f. Is speaking carefully worth the trouble? Why or why not?
  - g. Jeff closed Sunday’s sermon with the example of parents who gave their son two smooth pocket stones. Each parent wrote a few words of exhortation on one of the stones, then they gave them to their son. He carried those stones with him for years. Think of someone important in your life. If you were going to give them a pocket stone with a positive word or phrase of exhortation, what would you put on the stone? (Whether you actually give them a stone or not, be sure you’re speaking that message into their life repeatedly!)

## Genesis 27:1-35

When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, "My son;" and he answered, "Here I am." <sup>2</sup>He said, "See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. <sup>3</sup>Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me. <sup>4</sup>Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die."

<sup>5</sup> Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, <sup>6</sup>Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I heard your father say to your brother Esau, <sup>7</sup>Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food to eat, that I may bless you before the LORD before I die.' <sup>8</sup>Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. <sup>9</sup>Go to the flock, and get me two choice goats, so I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he likes; <sup>10</sup>and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies."

<sup>11</sup>But Jacob said to his mother, "My brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a man of smooth skin. <sup>12</sup>Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing." <sup>13</sup>His mother said, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me." <sup>14</sup>So he went and got them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savory food. <sup>15</sup>Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; <sup>16</sup>and she put the skins of the goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. <sup>17</sup>Then she handed the savory food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

<sup>18</sup> So he went in to his father, and said, "My father;" and he said, "Here I am; who are you?" <sup>19</sup>Jacob said, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me." <sup>20</sup>But Isaac said, "How is it that you have found it so quickly?" He answered, "Because the LORD your God granted me success." <sup>21</sup>Then Isaac said, "Come near, that I may feel you to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.' <sup>22</sup>So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's, but the hands are the hands of Esau." <sup>24</sup>He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." <sup>25</sup>Then he said, "Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. <sup>26</sup>Then his father said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." <sup>27</sup>So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed. <sup>28</sup> May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. <sup>29</sup> Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons

bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!"

30 As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother Esau came in from his hunting. <sup>31</sup>He also prepared savory food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father sit up and eat of his son's game, so that you may bless me." <sup>32</sup>His father said, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your firstborn son, Esau." <sup>33</sup>Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? – yes, and blessed he shall be!"

<sup>34</sup>When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, me also, father!" <sup>35</sup>But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing."